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Volume 3 (2003)

Interface: The Journal of Education, Community
and Values

12-1-2003

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Recommended Citation

Barlow, J. (2003). Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi [Review]. *Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and Values* 3(9). Available <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/09/pax.php>

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Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi

Description

Review of *Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi* / Salam Pax. Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi. New York: Grove Press, 2003.

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Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi

Posted on **December 1, 2003** by **Editor**



By **Jeffrey Barlow** <barlowj@pacificu.edu>

Salam Pax. *Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi*. New York: Grove Press, 2003.

One of our constant interests at the Berglund Center is the impact of the Internet on political interactions. This book, *Salam Pax*, is a fascinating example of how the Internet sometimes works to bring ordinary people into sudden prominence and influence. Salam Pax is the pseudonym of an “ordinary” Iraqi who “blogged” from Baghdad before, during, and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. He was long a mystery figure, and given the intensely political use of electronic communications in the context of that war, many saw him as less a person than as a political role. To many, he was a CIA fiction intended to sow disinformation; to others, a propaganda construct of the Hussein regime. In some senses, the truth of his identify is more complex than either (or both?) of these extremes.

Judging from this book, we must see Salam Pax as a highly educated and urban Iraqi with a fierce personal commitment to his Arab identity, an identity that includes no more than an amused commitment to Islam. From Salam we learn that the usual stereotypes of many regarding Iraq and Iraqis just won’t fly. He seems by hints dropped throughout the book to belong very much to the urban demimonde of a highly modern Iraqi culture. If he despises Sadaam Hussein, neither does he support the American attack on Iraq. As he puts it, “No one inside Iraq is for war (note I said “war”, not “a change of regime”. (p. 119) He continually reminds Americans that the situation in Iraq had a great many critical variable in addition to the repressive violence of the Hussein regime, particularly important was previous U.S. policy which Salam credits with creating many of the conditions that the U.S. then invaded to rectify. To say that he is suspicious of U.S. motives would be a massive understatement.

But politics aside, the book gives fascinating insight into an increasingly important segment of the global community: intellectuals with modern values which we might loosely typify as “human

rights” who have been in large part created by the Internet itself, and depend on it for their continuing identity. A repeated theme of the book is simply Salam’s struggle to stay “online” while a city he greatly loves is being bombed and shelled.

Another important aspect of the work is what it tells us about the impact of “blogging”. [1] Blogging is a sort of collective diary where individuals utilize web protocols to post their thoughts, usually permitting others to add to the discourse, which may be done by adding text into the site or linking to it from external sites. These ruminations thus become vastly extended distributed written pieces, intensely personal, sometimes maddeningly irrelevant, but at critical moments like the war in Iraq, they have the potential to mobilize the attention of millions, as did Salam Pax himself.

This book is, like a blog itself, seemingly a work in progress. Salam is self-referential in the extreme, quoting himself from his blogging, and quoting others reaction to him, meanwhile replying in the book itself. While he is aware of his growing celebrity, he is also very critical of it, continually reminding us that he is no expert.

Salam Pax is not for everybody; it required a certain amount of curiosity to follow Salam through his extremely personal preoccupations to learn not only about him, but about his country, and more importantly, the impact of the Internet. If these are topics that might interest you, then *Salam Pax* is worthwhile.

As I write this review in an Internet Café in Beijing, where my two dollar lunch buys me an hour of free Internet browsing, I am surrounded by people, mostly teens and 20-somethings, much like Salam himself. Some are playing games, some are doing e-mail and many are blogging. And also like Salam himself, they have at any moment the possibility of becoming influential political or cultural actors, due to the impact of the Internet.

Jeffrey Barlow
Editor, *Interface*.

NOTES:

[1] Sullivan, Andrew. “The Blogging Revolution ” *Wired Magazine*. Issue 10.05
<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/10.05/mustread.html?pg=2>

For some sites related to Salam Pax, see:

Maass, Peter “Salam Pax Is Real” June 2, 2003, <http://www.slate.com/id/2083847/>
“The Baghdad Blog” <http://www.thebaghdadblog.com/home/>

“Salam’s story” May 30, 2003 The Guardian
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,966819,00.html>

Jarvis, Jeff. BuzzMachine,

http://www.buzzmachine.com/archives/2003_05.html

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6 THOUGHTS ON "SALAM PAX: THE CLANDESTINE DIARY OF AN ORDINARY IRAQI"

social network

on **January 30, 2014 at 11:33 AM** said:

Be very good to each other is a single of my popular quotes. I virtually wrote a post about that last week! Party on, dude.

headlines

on **January 30, 2014 at 1:54 PM** said:

After examine a few of the blog posts on your web site now, and I incredibly like your techniques of blogging. I bookmarked it to my bookmark site list and might be checking back soon. Pls try my internet site as well and let me know what you think.

Merlin Ballina

on **January 30, 2014 at 6:16 PM** said:

My brother recommended I would possibly like this blog. He was once totally right. This submit truly made my day. You can not believe simply how a lot time I had spent for this information! Thanks!

plotka

on **February 1, 2014 at 1:46 AM** said:

Thank you for sharing great information. Your website is really cool. I am impressed by the information that you have on this site. It reveals how nicely you realize this subject.

Bookmarked this internet site page, will arrive back for much more articles.

polskiej rozrywki wiadomosci

on **February 1, 2014 at 3:53 AM** said:

Be excellent to each other is a single of my common quotes. I nearly wrote a write-up about that last week! Party on, dude.

nigeria dating

on **February 5, 2014 at 12:16 AM** said:

unhappy for the vast review, but I'm really loving the post, and hope this, and the very good analysis some other people have written, will aid you determine if it's the right option for you.